



Sleeper™

ed brubaker
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#12
MAR



SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS

Sean
2003

BERMUDA, A LITTLE OVER
THREE MONTHS LATER...

All things considered,
I actually made it
pretty far before
they found me.

But I knew they
would eventually.

When both sides of the world's
intelligence community are searching
for you, you can only expect to run
free for so long.

The Road to Hell



I lasted a lot longer than I expected to, really...

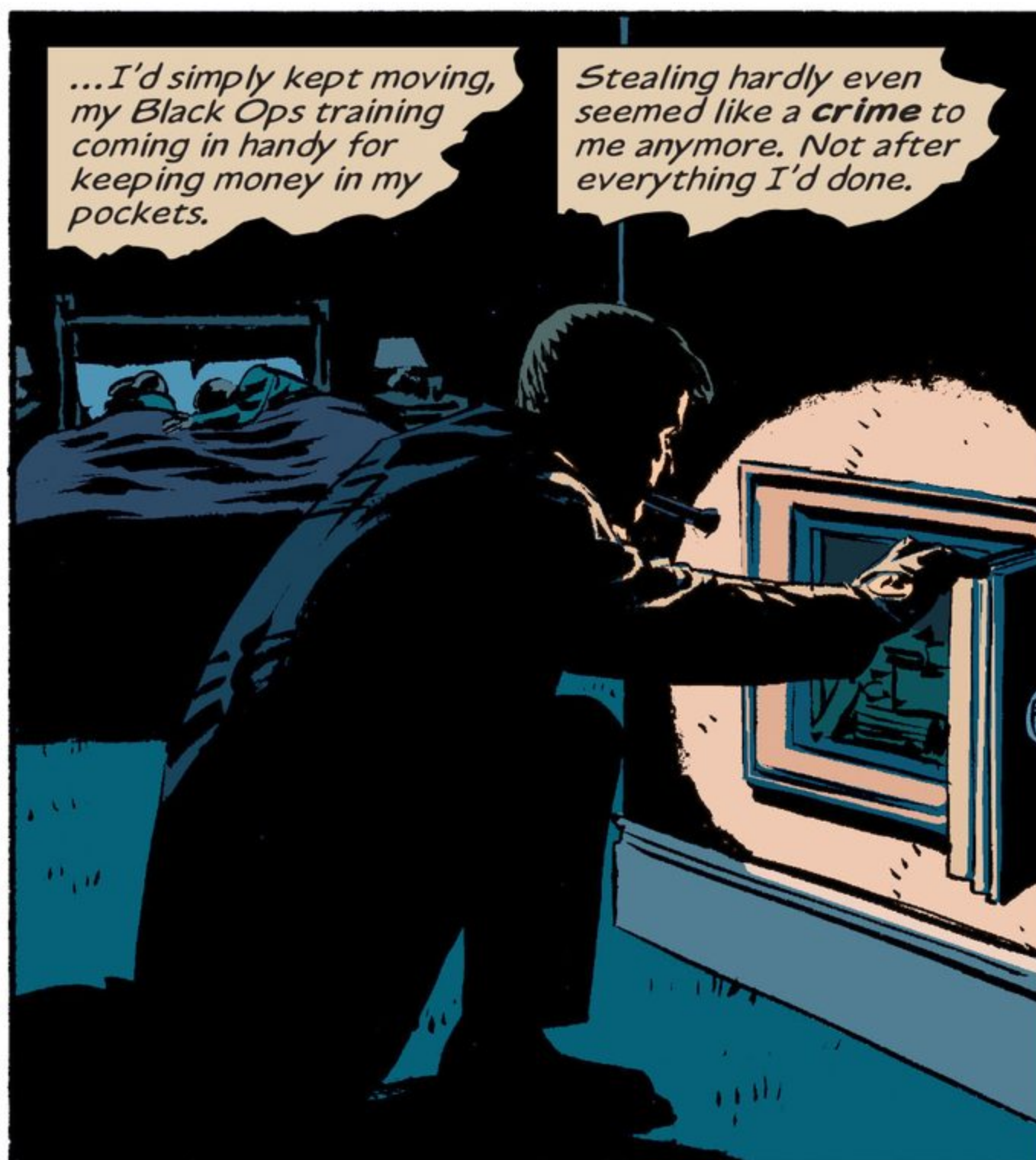


...And I wasn't throwing in the towel yet.



My months on the run hadn't been as difficult as I expected them to be, really.

Once I'd found a way out of the country on a freighter...



...I'd simply kept moving, my Black Ops training coming in handy for keeping money in my pockets.

*Stealing hardly even seemed like a **crime** to me anymore. Not after everything I'd done.*

And as for the hiding part, I figured I would be harder to find in a crowd than I would be in some small South American village.

The Nazis had the Odessa network to sneak them away and into new lives, but for rogue post-human secret agents, there was nothing like that.



So, instead my life became like a permanent vacation. I followed the crowds, the tourists...



I went everywhere that I'd never have been caught dead before.



And I tried as hard as I could to seem just as clueless and easy-to-please as the rest of the monkey-mass that surrounded me.



It wasn't living, but it wasn't death, either.



The problem was, I knew
that death was always just
three steps behind me...



...If I was
lucky.

HOLD IT
RIGHT--



DAMN IT...
C.I.A....



HOW THE
HELL AM I
GETTING OUT OF
THIS ONE?





The Feds were bound to have the harbor and the main airport locked down.

But an airstrip this small, outside of town, might be off their radar for the moment...



Which is exactly
where I wanted
to be.

HEY--WHAT
THE FUCK'RE
YOU--

IN THE PLANE!
NOW!

NOW,
HOLD ON A
SEC, MISTER...
I DON'T

YOU TWO. SIT BACK
DOWN AND YOU CAN
LIVE.

YOU. GET IN YOUR
FUCKING PLANE
NOW.

YOU'RE GOING
TO FLY ME OUT
OF HERE.

JUST HOLD ON
NOW. I'M TRYIN'
TO TELL YOU...

--THAT
PLANE ISN'T GOING
ANYWHERE...





MEET MY NEWEST
TORPEDO. HIS FULL
CODENAME IS THE BLUE
MEANIE, BUT WE USUALLY
JUST CALL HIM BLUE.

I THINK
YOU'LL LIKE
HIM.



FUCK YOU!

I'M GONNA KILL
HIM AND **YOU**
THE SECOND I
GET OUT OF
THIS FUCKING
THING!



NOW YOU'RE
JUST BEING
RIDICULOUS,
HOLDEN.

PETER,
HELP OUR
FRIEND SEE IT
MY WAY...



FINALLY...



*Peter Grimm's touch is unlike
anything I've known.*

*My mind screams,
but my voice
can't find the air
to make a
sound.*



*Images flood through me,
memories that stab.
Memories of feelings. And
of death, betrayal.*

*Memories of everything
that ever went wrong in
my life, endlessly looping
on each other.*

Laughing at me.



And then it stops.

I didn't know he could stop it, but I thank God he can.



NOW, ARE YOU GOING TO LISTEN TO ME, OR DO YOU WANT ANOTHER MOMENT ALONE WITH YOUR THOUGHTS?



...NO MORE...OF THAT...

RIGHT. PETER, YOU AND BLUE GUARD THE PERIMETER WHILE I STRAIGHTEN THINGS OUT WITH OUR WANDERING SON.

THAT FIELD SHOULD HOLD FOR AT LEAST TEN MINUTES, SIR.



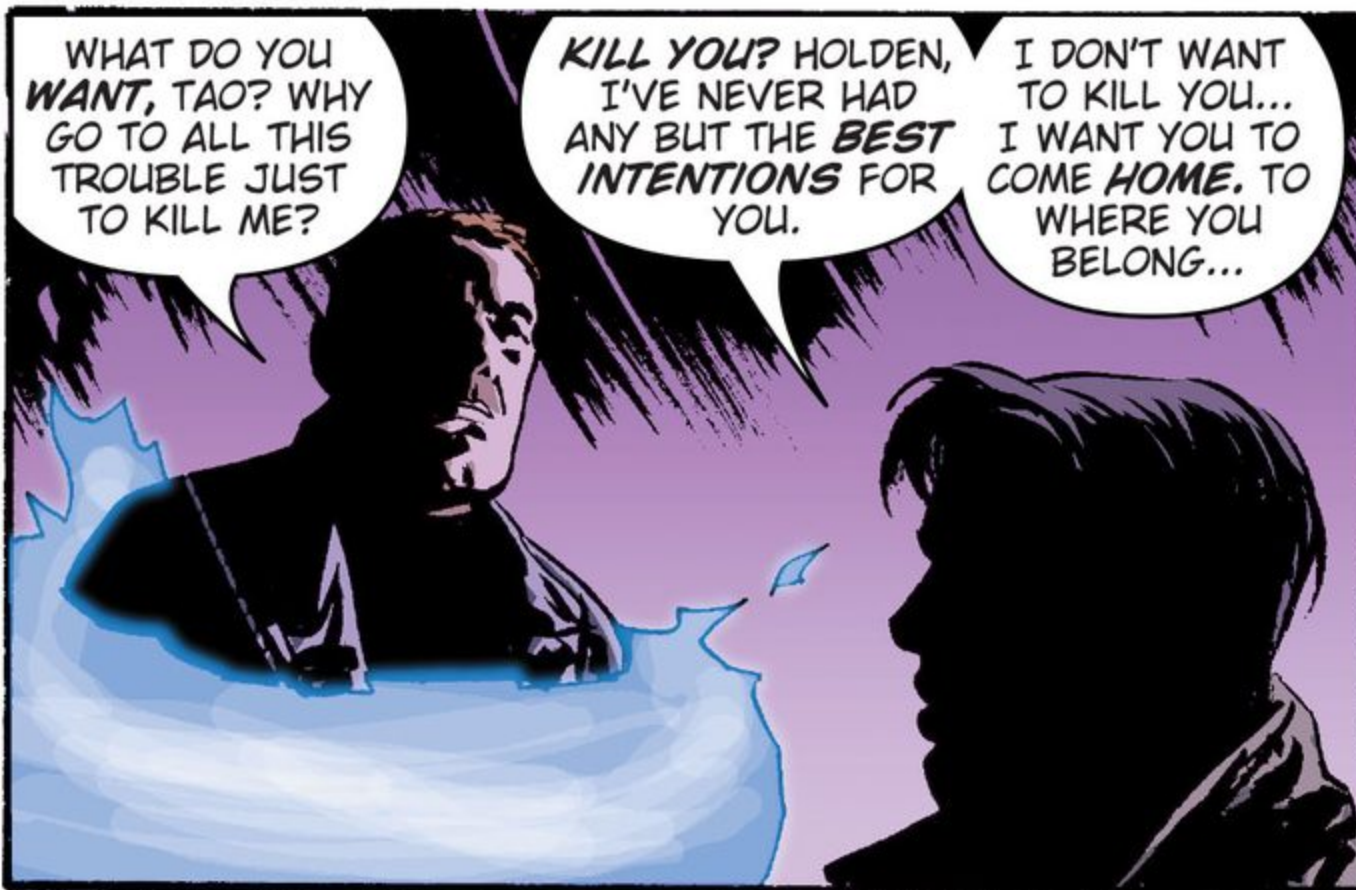
MORE THAN ENOUGH TIME.



WHAT DO YOU WANT, TAO? WHY GO TO ALL THIS TROUBLE JUST TO KILL ME?

KILL YOU? HOLDEN, I'VE NEVER HAD ANY BUT THE BEST INTENTIONS FOR YOU.

I DON'T WANT TO KILL YOU... I WANT YOU TO COME HOME, TO WHERE YOU BELONG...



YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND.



AM I? THEN TELL ME ONE THING, HOLDEN... YOU WERE IN THE HANDS OF I.O. FOR A WEEK, AND YOU DIDN'T *ONCE* TRY TO TELL THEM WHO YOU *REALLY* WERE...

...WHY IS *THAT*, DO YOU THINK?

THEY WOULDN'T'VE *BELIEVED* ME, I HAD NO PROOF...

YOU SAW TO *THAT*, DIDN'T YOU?

WAS IT *ME* WHO BURNED YOUR FILE?

YOU COULD'VE LET PETER CONTINUE HIS FIGHT AND SIMPLY RUN OFF TO THE AUTHORITIES WITH ALL THE PROOF YOU'D *NEED* IN HAND. STRANGELY THOUGH, YOU DIDN'T...

COULDN'T TAKE THE RISK.

IS *THAT* WHAT YOU TELL YOURSELF? SEE, I THINK IT'S SOMETHING ELSE...

WHAT?

I THINK YOU'RE NOT ENTIRELY SURE WHICH SIDE YOU'RE *ON* ANYMORE, HOLDEN... AND I THINK YOU'RE PUNISHING YOURSELF BECAUSE OF THAT.

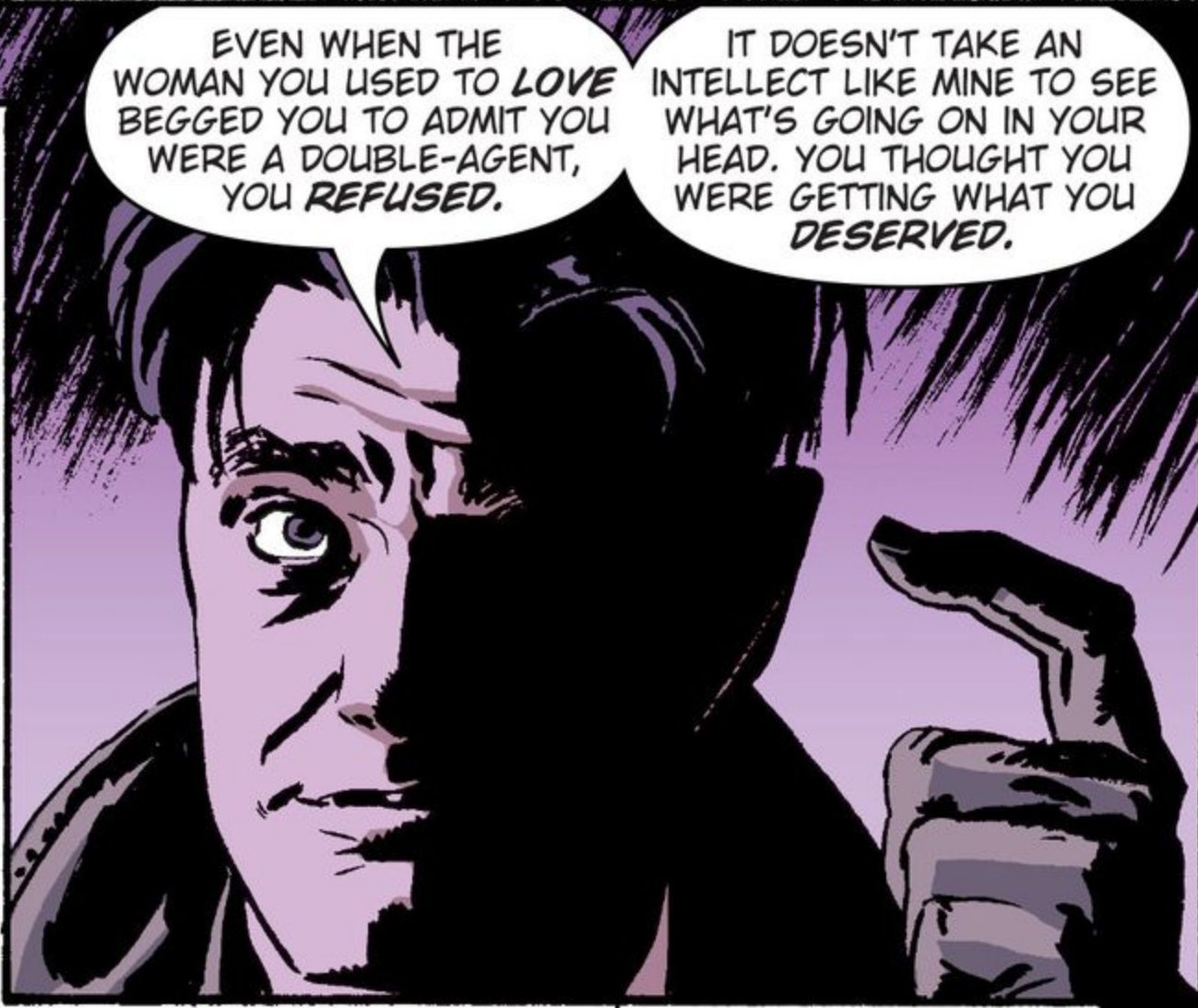
BULLSHIT.

I DON'T THINK SO... LET'S *REASON THIS OUT*, SHALL WE?



YOU WERE WILLING TO SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE BEING CUT TO PIECES AND STUDIED LIKE SOME LAB RAT...

...WITHOUT SAYING *ONE WORD* TO TRY TO SAVE YOURSELF.



EVEN WHEN THE WOMAN YOU USED TO *LOVE* BEGGED YOU TO ADMIT YOU WERE A DOUBLE-AGENT, YOU *REFUSED*.

IT DOESN'T TAKE AN INTELLECT LIKE MINE TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR HEAD. YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE GETTING WHAT YOU *DESERVED*.



MAYBE I *WAS*--HEY, HOW THE FUCK DO YOU EVEN *KNOW* ABOUT THAT?

DON'T DERAILED ME. MY POINT IS THAT WHEN YOU GOT A CHANCE TO *ESCAPE*, YOU *TOOK* IT.

DON'T YOU *SEE*? INSIDE, YOU KNOW THE TRUTH.



WHAT ARE YOU--WHAT *TRUTH*?



THAT *NO ONE* DESERVES *ANYTHING*. THAT YOU HAVE *NOTHING* TO BE ASHAMED OF.



YOU'RE REALLY AN *ALIEN*, AREN'T YOU?

DO YOU HAVE *ANY IDEA* HOW MUCH *BLOOD* THERE IS ON MY HANDS?



BECAUSE YOU REFUSE TO WASH IT AWAY.



YOU REFUSE TO ACCEPT WHO YOU *REALLY* ARE.



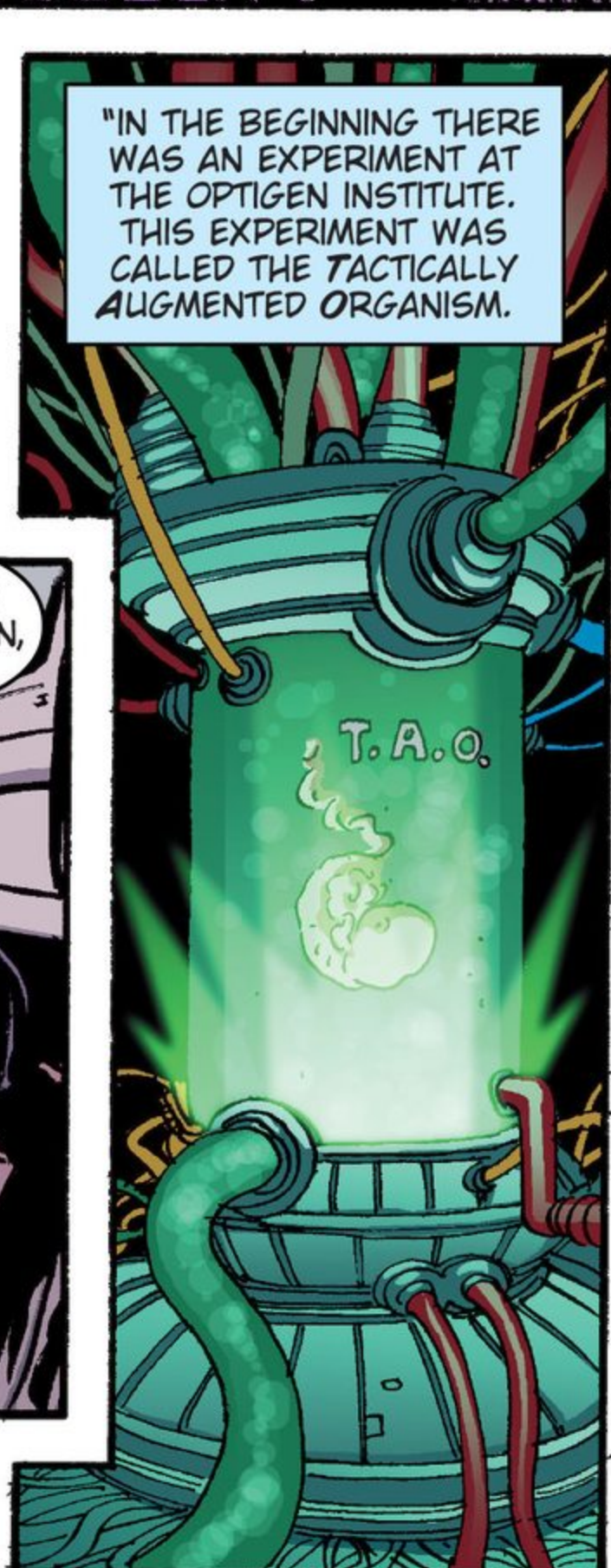
LET ME TELL YOU A STORY. YOUR MISSION FROM LYNCH WAS TO INFILTRATE MY ORGANIZATION AND FIND OUT MY *INTENTIONS*, CORRECT?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT.



LET'S *COMPLETE* YOUR MISSION FOR THE OLD MAN, THEN, WHY DON'T WE?

IN A ROUNDABOUT WAY, AT LEAST...



"IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS AN EXPERIMENT AT THE OPTIGEN INSTITUTE. THIS EXPERIMENT WAS CALLED THE TACTICALLY AUGMENTED ORGANISM.



"IT HAD NO MOTHER, IT HAD NO FATHER. JUST DR. RUARK AND HIS ASSISTANTS, AND THEIR YEARS OF RESEARCH INTO ADAPTIVE INTELLIGENCE AND DNA IMPLANTATION.



"TAO, AS THEY CALLED THE BABY, BEGAN TO SPEAK WHEN HE WAS ONLY A WEEK OLD, TERRIFYING HIS CREATORS WITH HIS FIRST WORDS..."

WHY AM I HERE?



"THEY HAD NOT IMAGINED THE ORGANISM WOULD EVOLVE SO QUICKLY, NOR THAT ITS SENSE OF SELF WOULD BE FULLY-FORMED BEFORE THEY COULD CONTROL IT.

"THE WISEST OF THEM ARGUED TO DESTROY IT, BUT THE OTHERS WOULDN'T LISTEN.

"BY THE TIME TAO WAS ONE YEAR OLD, HE LOOKED LIKE AN ADOLESCENT, AND THERE WAS NOTHING HE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE MEN WORKING AROUND HIM.

"IN FACT, OTHER THAN DR. RUARK, THEY WERE NOW ALL AFRAID OF HIM AND WOULDN'T EVEN LOOK AT HIM FROM A SAFE DISTANCE.

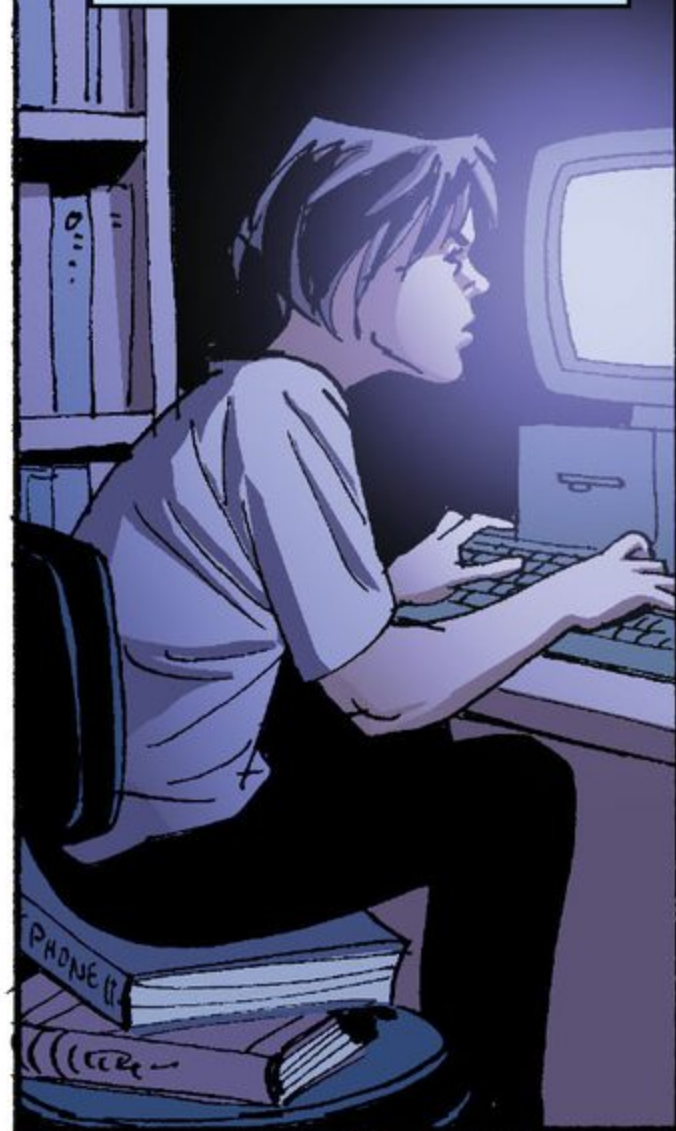


"AND WITH NO ONE WATCHING, HE BEGAN TO SNEAK OUT OF HIS CAGE AT NIGHT.



"THRU OPTIGEN'S COMPUTER SYSTEM, HE WAS ABLE TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD. HE STUDIED HISTORY, RELIGION, POLITICS, EVEN ART AND LITERATURE...

"MOST OF THIS HE FOUND IN SECRET GOVERNMENT DATABASES THAT ATTEMPT TO STORE ALL KNOWLEDGE.



"BY THE TIME HE LOOKED LIKE AN ADULT, HE HAD READ EVERYTHING OF CONSEQUENCE EVER WRITTEN. INCLUDING FORBIDDEN TEXTS, HISTORY NOT WRITTEN BY THE VICTORS.

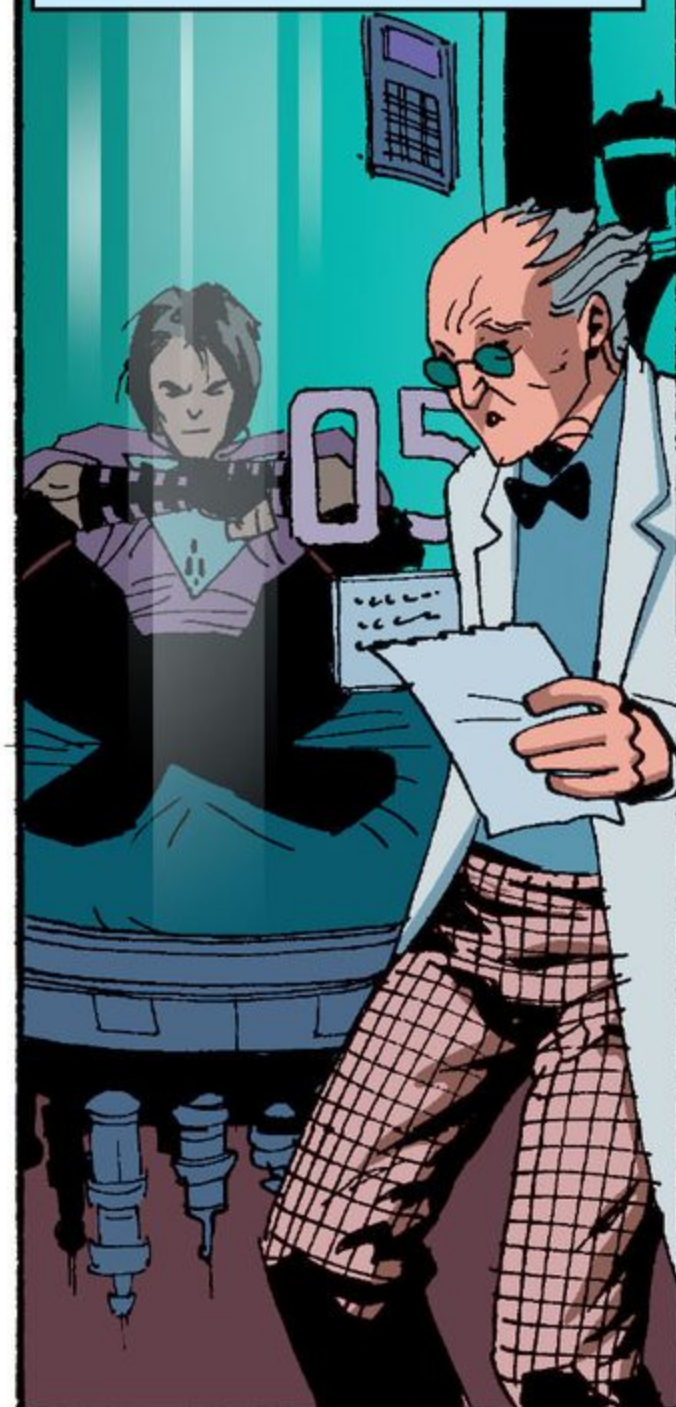


"WHAT HE LEARNED FILLED HIM WITH DISDAIN FOR THE HUMAN RACE.

"MANKIND REPEATEDLY ASKED THE SAME QUESTIONS HE HAD AS A BABY, AND SIMPLY MADE UP THEIR OWN ANSWERS. LIED TO THEMSELVES TO GIVE LIFE MEANING.



"OF COURSE, BY NOW HE HAD GROWN TIRED OF HIS GAMES WITH THE MEN AROUND HIM, ESPECIALLY DR. RUARK... SO HE ENGINEERED HIS RELEASE FROM OPTIGEN.



"COMICALLY ENOUGH, HE WAS GIVEN TO A GROUP OF **SUPER-HEROES**, WHO KNEW LITTLE ABOUT HIM, BUT DIDN'T ONCE WORRY WHAT HIS TRUE GOALS MIGHT BE.

"TO BE FAIR, THOUGH, AT THAT POINT EVEN HE WAS NOT SURE WHAT HE WANTED TO DO IN THE WORLD.



"BUT HE SOON REALIZED IT WAS **NOT** BEING A COSTUMED HERO. THAT WAS A LIFE OF EMPTY GESTURES. ALWAYS FIGHTING THE SYMPTOM AND NOT THE CAUSE.

"SWEATING BLOOD FOR THE STATUS QUO.



"HE DECIDED TO SHOW THE HEROES HOW RIDICULOUS THEY WERE, SO HE MANIPULATED THEM INTO A WAR, EVEN PITTING THEM AGAINST OTHER HEROES.



"IT NEVER FAILED TO AMUSE HIM THAT SUPER-HEROES INEVITABLY CAME TO BLOWS WHENEVER THEY ENCOUNTERED ONE ANOTHER.



"BUT IN SPITE OF HIS EFFORTS, HE FOUND THESE HEROES WERE TOO BLIND TO THEIR OWN ACTIONS TO SEE THE TRUTH ABOUT THEM.

"SO HE LEFT, FAKING HIS OWN DEATH TO BUY SOME TIME.



"HE HAD READ ABOUT A SECRET MONARCHY WHO HAD BEEN MANIPULATING THE WORLD FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

"THAT SOUNDED MORE LIKE HIS KIND OF PEOPLE.



"AND SO HE TRAVELED THE WORLD. YET EVERYWHERE HE WENT, HE WAS STAGGERED BY THE DEPTH OF THE IGNORANCE THAT SURROUNDED HIM.



"ON CLOSE CONTACT, MANKIND ACTUALLY REPULSED HIM. EVEN THEIR EASY PLIABILITY QUICKLY GREW OLD.



"AND SADLY, WHEN HE FINALLY GAINED ACCESS TO THE COURT OF THIS SECRET MONARCHY, THEY WERE NOT THE LIKE-MINDED SOULS HE'D HOPED FOR.

"HE FOUND INSTEAD THE **REASON** FOR MANKIND'S OBSEQUIOUSNESS.



"THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF SOVEREIGNTY HAD NOT ELEVATED THESE MEN FROM THE MASSES THEY KEPT IN THE DARK. THEY SIMPLY TOLD THEMSELVES DIFFERENT LIES.



"HE KNEW IMMEDIATELY THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO DESTROY THEM, TOO, BEFORE HIS WORK WAS DONE.

"OR RATHER, THAT HE WOULD MAKE THEM DESTROY THEMSELVES...THAT WOULD BE MORE AMUSING.



"SO HE BEGAN GATHERING FOLLOWERS, WHICH WAS SIMPLE. THE ILLUSION OF POWER AND WEALTH BOUGHT THE LOYALTY OF MOST MEN.

"AND HIS TEAMS BEGAN STRIKING AROUND THE GLOBE, LEAVING NO CLUE TO THEIR AGENDA.

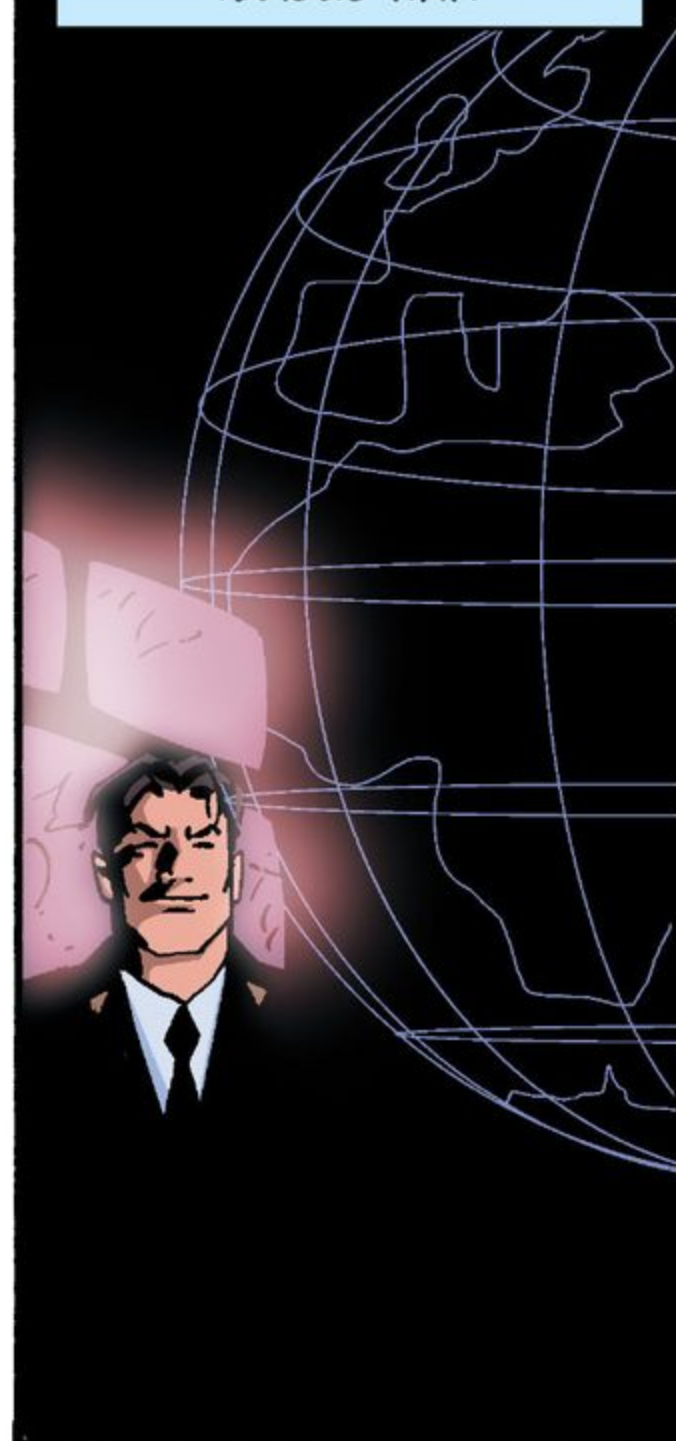


"HIS MEN INSIDE VARIOUS AGENCIES TOLD HIM HOW FRUSTRATED THEIR BOSSES WERE. WHAT WAS HE PLANNING? WHAT WAS HE AFTER?

"SOME FEARED HE WANTED TO RULE THE WORLD, BUT NOTHING COULD'VE BEEN FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.



"WHAT HE REALLY WANTED WAS TO SHATTER THE LIES, TO FRACTURE THE HIDDEN SYSTEMS THAT KEPT THE WORLD TURNING IN SUCH A TEDIOUS WAY.



"BECAUSE WHEN THE TACTICALLY AUGMENTED ORGANISM LOOKED AT LIFE HE SAW ONLY CHAOS AND ORDER. AND HUMANITY'S DENIAL OF CHAOS APPALLED HIM.



"SO HE WOULD TEAR IT ALL DOWN AND FILL THE WHOLE WORLD WITH CHAOS, IF ONLY TO WATCH MANKIND CLING TO THEIR ILLUSIONS AS THEY BURNED AROUND THEM...



...WOULD HE **DESTROY** THE WORLD AT THE SAME TIME? IT'S CERTAINLY A POSSIBILITY.



SO,
WAIT...

...YOU WANT TO TEAR
DOWN THE WORLD FOR
THE FUCKING *HELL* OF IT?
THAT'S JUST SICK.

SOMETIMES
YOU HAVE TO
BURN A WORLD TO
THE GROUND TO
MAKE ROOM FOR
A NEW ONE.

BESIDES, IMAGINE HOW MUCH
MORE IMPRESSIVE *NERO'S FIDDLING*
WOULD'VE BEEN IF HE HAD *PERSONALLY*
LIT THE FIRES THAT DESTROYED ROME.

JESUS CHRIST...YOU'RE
LIKE SOME TWISTED KID
AND WE'RE ALL JUST
YOUR FUCKING *TOYS*,
AREN'T WE?

I SUPPOSE
THERE'S *SOME* TRUTH
THERE, BUT IT'S MUCH
MORE COMPLICATED
THAN THAT.

DO YOU WANT
TO KNOW THE MAIN
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
YOU AND ME,
HOLDEN?

YOU'RE LIKE THE
REST OF HUMANITY, YOU
HAVE TWO PEOPLE INSIDE.
ONE IS THE PERSON WE SEE,
THE OTHER IS THE PERSON
YOU THINK YOU ARE.

YOU CAN *KILL* ON THE ORDERS
OF THE USA, AND TELL YOURSELF
THAT YOU'RE STILL *REALLY* A
GOOD PERSON INSIDE.

BUT PEOPLE, IN
GENERAL, ARE *NOT*
NICE, THEY JUST TELL
THEMSELVES THEY
ARE.

ON THE OTHER HAND,
I SEE ONLY ACTION. YOU
ARE WHAT YOU *DO*, NOT
WHAT YOU *THINK*.

THERE'S A *REASON*
AFTER ALL, THAT THE ROAD
TO HELL IS PAVED WITH
GOOD INTENTIONS.

YOU'VE BEEN
PAVING YOUR OWN
PATH THAT WAY FOR A
LONG TIME NOW...

...SO MAYBE IT'S
TIME TO STOP LYING TO
YOURSELF ABOUT THE
INTENTIONS MAKING *ANY*
DIFFERENCE.

IF I BELIEVE THAT,
THEN I'M JUST AS
EVIL AND TWISTED AS
YOU, AREN'T I?

MUNDANE CONCEPTS AT BEST.
I'M OFFERING YOU A CHANCE TO
RISE ABOVE SUCH THOUGHTS. TO
BE *MORE* THAN A PAWN IN SOME
MORALITY PLAY.

WHY?
WHY OFFER *ME*
ANYTHING?

BECAUSE YOU'RE
ALREADY PART OF
THE GAME, AND BECAUSE
MISS MISERY WOULD
LIKE YOU TO RETURN,
AS WELL.

THOUGH
SHE'D BE
LOATH TO SAY
SO.

SHE'S
OKAY?

OF COURSE.
NOTHING TAKES
HER DOWN FOR
LONG.

LOOK, HOLDEN,
IF YOU CAN'T WASH
THE BLOOD FROM
YOUR HANDS, AT
LEAST COME BACK
BECAUSE IT'S
SAFE.

THE REST
WILL BECOME
EASIER OVER
TIME.

TAO, WE'VE GOT **COMPANY**. TWO SQUADS, COMING IN FROM BOTH SIDES.

RIGHT. I STILL NEED ANOTHER MINUTE...CAN YOU TWO HANDLE THEM?

ABSOLUTELY.

ATTENTION AT THE PLANE! GET ON YOUR KNEES WITH YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR--



WELL, AGENT CARVER? IT'S **YOUR CHOICE** NOW...

IS **THIS** THE LIFE YOU'D PREFER? NEVER KNOWING WHEN THE PEOPLE YOU THINK OF AS YOUR OWN WILL TRY TO TAKE YOU OUT?

Standing on that tarmac, I know that Tao has staged this entire event for my benefit. It had to have been him who tipped off the C.I.A. to my whereabouts.

And as usual, the entire world is going right according to his plans.

The sick part is, a lot of what he says makes sense.

Watching these men get cut down inspires no sympathy in me at all. These men who are supposed to be on my side.

But I'm haunted by Genocide's death, a sociopathic mass-murderer.

And hearing that Miss Misery is alright brings me my first moment of relief in months.

But Tao is clearly insane, if that concept even applies to him.

He's Frankenstein's monster in the flesh, wondering why he doesn't have a soul, and taking it out on the rest of the world.

Still, so much of what he says makes sense... Goddamn it, that's just what he wants me to think...

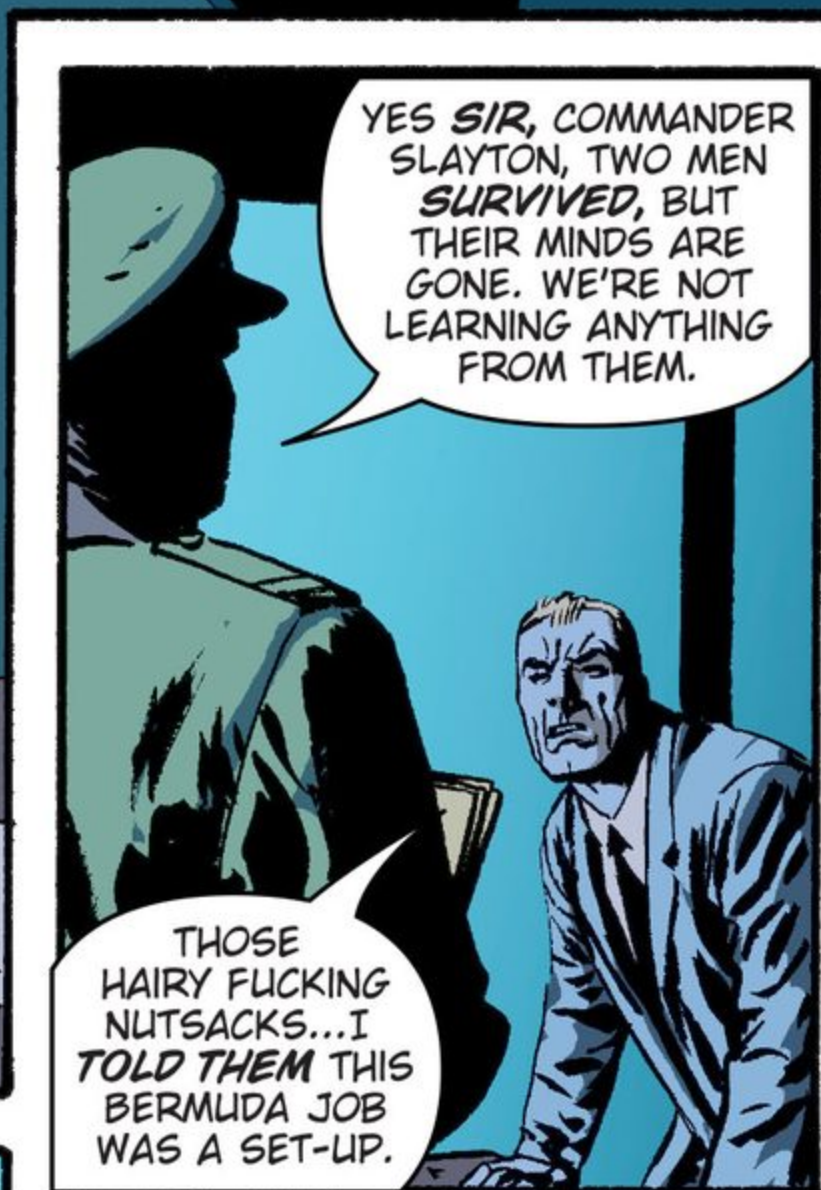
He's just like Lynch, offering me a choice when there's no other option left.

WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF **TIME**, AGENT... THEIR BACK-UP IS BOUND TO BE HEAVIER.

So, what the hell am I supposed to do? Where else can I turn?



--ALL OF THEM?



YES *SIR*, COMMANDER SLAYTON, TWO MEN **SURVIVED**, BUT THEIR MINDS ARE GONE. WE'RE NOT LEARNING ANYTHING FROM THEM.

THOSE HAIRY FUCKING NUTSACKS...I TOLD THEM THIS BERMUDA JOB WAS A SET-UP.



THERE IS *THIS*. JUST CAME THROUGH ON SAT-COM.

I THINK THAT'S OUR ROGUE THERE, ISN'T IT?



HARD TO SAY, REALLY...HE DOESN'T LOOK TOO HAPPY TO--

COMMANDER SLAYTON, WE'VE GOT A SITUATION.



DAMN IT TO HELL. LOOKS LIKE HE'S FOUND HIS WAY BACK HOME THERE, DOESN'T IT?



I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF A BRIEFING, DOCTOR, SO WHY DON'T YOU JUST--

REALLY, *SIR*, I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO **SEE** THIS...



Brubaker – Phillips – Aviña – Lopez – Quinn – Dunbier